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'Destabilizing' Jamaica

ON JULY 2, Louis Wolf, editor of the Washington-based "Covert Action Information Bulletin," held a press conference in Jamaica to identify 15 Americans (by name, address, car license and so on) as CIA agents participating in a "destabilization" campaign. Two days later, the home of the man named as the CIA's station chief was bombed and shot up and a few days after that armed men fired on guards outside the home of a second man named. Families of at least six of the 15 subsequently departed Jamaica.

Well, you may say, it's ugly and dangerous and all that but it's just the latest act in an anti-American set piece in which a few despicable Americans, Soviet-bloc (in this case, Cuban) intelligence operatives and assorted gunslingers take familiar roles. Legislation to cope with the American participation is currently under intense study in Washington. But there's something else. The island's single and state-run television station broadcast the full details, including photos and phone numbers, of the "CIA agents" identified by Louis Wolf. Twice. Youth groups of Prime Minister Michael Manley's party have been distributing the Wolf material on handbills. Thus has Mr. Manley actively supported Mr. Wolf's action.

It is necessary to back off a bit and try to explain how Mr. Manley, respected as a democratic socialist when he came to office in 1972, has led his formerly orderly and hard-working country to a condition of epidemic violence, economic catastrophe and political chaos. The more support he has received from the United States, by the way—he has been a favorite of the Carter administration in rhetoric and in aid—the more defiant his attitude toward Washington has become.

Some in Jamaica think Mr. Manley always had it in him to move erratically, to the left. Others suspect that in the turbulence of the last eight years, a core of local Marxists working closely with Cubans has shrewdly exploited his innocence and good will. Leftists in the journalistic corps, for instance, have cap-

tured the government-owned media. Mr. Manley himself seems to have lost control last spring when his party's executive council evidently ignored his counsel and demanded that he reject the terms on which the International Monetary Fund was offering a drowning Jamaica a last life preserver.

Jamaica is, to be sure, a democratic country, and a campaign is heating up now for elections expected by the fall. It is in the context of that campaign, in which the opposition has made much of Mr. Manley's Cuban connection, that the government has sown allegations of the opposition's ties to the CIA. A note on that Cuban connection: last month the Jamaican manager of a Leichtenstein-registered company suspected of being a Cuban front was found to have imported 200,000 prohibited shotgun cartridges without a permit. The public prosecutor ordered him not to leave the country. Emigration officials then found him about to take off for Havana, in a plane chartered by the Cuban ambassador, with Mr. Manley's minister of national security. The minister subsequently explained that he was on sick leave and had gotten on the ambassador's plane because the scheduled flight was grounded and he didn't even know the other fellow was aboard.

On the exchange of destabilization charges, it is hard to be sure. Some Jamaicans do believe that Cubans, with their local supporters (witting and unwitting), are in a position to create the chaos that would let Mr. Manley declare a state of emergency and suspend elections. Mr. Manley denies any such intent. What is more certain is that the Cubans have established a position in Kingston that helps them throughout the English-speaking Caribbean.

To credit charges that the CIA is trying to "destabilize" Jamaica, however, you have to believe that Jimmy Carter and his Caribbean point man, Andrew Young, are behind such a campaign. We don't believe it. We think that Jamaica has never had a greater need for fair and free elections.